

WEST HARRISON NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

Minutes of Meeting: April 26, 2006 at the West Harrison Fire House

Attendance: Total - 57. Board members present: Gregg Rosenberg, Jeff LaGrotte, Lisa Faillace-Sciliano, Fred Sciliano, Angela Amodeo, Charles Russo, Geri Barbagallo, Lori Wilson. Board member absent: Mario Gallo.

Fred Sciliano opened the meeting with a welcome to all members and guests, and thanks to all for coming.

The **minutes of the last meeting of March 15, 2006** were approved.

Treasurer's Report: Jeff LaGrotte – Balance is now \$11,600, thanks to a successful dinner dance. We are accepting dues now for 2006 and letters are in the mail requesting they be paid. Our tax exempt status has been further delayed because of a backlog in the state because of the many Hurricane Katrina organizations filing for the status and they are getting priority. We will need more income for this year's budget – last years budget was buoyed heavily with start-up donations from the board of directors.

DOT Report: Fred reported the mayor informed him that the vote by the affected residents about the noise barrier construction was overwhelmingly against it and it will not be built. (Members heartily applauded.) They will provide instead a decorative fence. Also, concerning the intersection issue, the intersection will remain open. They will instead try to realign the roadways. Fred thanked **Rose Grosskopf, the Sanchezs and the Robertsons** for their advocacy and leg work on this issue. And he thanked **State Assemblyman Adam Bradley** and his assistant **Linda Levine** for their assistance.

Fund Raising: Lori Wilson – Our April 1st dinner dance was very successful. 100 people attended and we raised \$7600, about a \$1000 on the dinner, \$2875 on the journal, which was underwritten by the Community Mutual Bank, and \$3627 on the silent auction. She thanked all our donors. We raised funds and built community at the same time. Let us know your comments.

Membership: Angela reported that we have 262 members. Membership is very important for the strength of our advocacy. **Lisa** reported the mailing of membership dues renewal notices and returns are coming in. Our membership committee will meet Monday about designing a newsletter.

Seniors: Ro Verano – we had a meeting on April 12th. The Monday lunch program/movie will continue during the summer either at the Preston School or at St. Anthony's School. **Ron Belmont** and **Rocco Troiano** are working on this. We are working on having an alternate lunch day when the rec is closed for a holiday on Monday. We will be advocating a Grandparent program and it is being worked on with the director of the Children's Day Center at the rec, **Stephanie Donworth**, to start in the fall. Seniors will need physicals and TB testing to participate – state, board of health regulation. A ceramic class is being planned for the fall or winter. The senior committee will request a meeting with the town board and the recreation superintendent to recommend a new building for the seniors. We are against renovations to the center because of safety concerns that would not be changed. We will prepare a survey to all West Harrison residents about opinions on what they would like to have in a senior program. We are working with **Joan Walsh**, town clerk and member on grant applications. Lunch will continue to be served by Pilonis and they will try to implement some senior suggestions. We will suggest to the seniors that they elect their own board of directors – president, secretary, etc. to manage their club and give members more organized input.

Planning & Zoning: Mary Malara – the town board has looked at 5 locations for potential town houses. Some areas have potential for them according to a builder's study. There are no zoning laws concerning town houses. There has been concern from residents about cars being left on our streets during the work day by out-of-town people working elsewhere. To be addressed by Traffic committee.

Public Works: Lisa – At the next meeting on May 11 we will meet with Bob Viscome about tree plantings. Reach out (to Lisa) about needs or complaints, eyesores. (Joan Walsh-on May 12th the Harrison Beautification Committee will be planting flowers). Lisa reported on Mary Ann DiSimone's efforts getting some structural work done on the library, and some attention to the yard. The HBC is looking for bids on plantings. They have ordered the ornamental clocks and one will be going at the corner of Halstead and Harrison Ave. down town. It has not been determined yet where to put the one for West Harrison.

Parks & Recreation: Charlie Russo – the field is in full swing, being used. We are looking deep into where our efforts of this committee should go. We need to give the senior committee our support and work together. We need to work on a cleanup around the lake and be concerned about the history of the surrounding area. Maybe plan a nature trail, a restoration. We want suggestions. The committee needs people to get involved. We want to have more conversations with the rec and the senior group. Report from the floor about people living in woods behind the lake – saw their camp when taking walk with children. Another comment said that this was reported to police but they said it was county and city of White Plains property. Fred said something needs to be done. People should call police and report. We need to approach the mayor and police chief. We will present this to them. Another comment from the floor – park should be closed to non-residents as is the pool. Their should be a check. Many residents want the park completely closed to out-of-towners. Charlie will follow up with this issue and also issue of fees.

Traffic and Safety: Gerri – Spoke to Chief Hall about people in the woods and he said they were on the White Plains side. Spoke about the worker's cars parking during the day. He is going to look into this issue.

The next meeting will be **Wednesday, May 24th at the Fire House**. The mayor will present plans for the streetscape project and the next phase of the park renovations.

Guest Presentation:

Fred introduced **David Singer**, the **President of the Board of Education**. He mentioned the upcoming budget vote and stated that the budget increase is the lowest in many years. The Board of Ed is working on many changes that need to be understood and they aim to create a district that is accountable to all children, parents and taxpayers. Mr. Singer introduced other school board members present, **Joe Accocella** and **Joan Tiburzi**, and then introduced **Superintendent Louis Wool**. Mr. Wool spoke of changes that this board has made since his appointment in 2002 and the planned budget for next year which will be a 5.12% increase. He came here finding some bad management issues and a poor system of accountability. They have since changed pretty much everything – hiring practices, background checks, recruiting. Teacher evaluation process was changed and upgraded. We have high standards now and high accountable and we want to spend your money properly. He hired one of the best business managers around - made many improvements. Have made high school competitive. Have fixed things and are still fixing things. Their plan for a bond referendum has not been completed. They don't want to cause a huge tax spike. Finally finishing paying off the high school debt. They have changed the way we pay tax certiaries. Every country club has these claims. We no longer borrow to pay these off. We built a

reserve to handle it. Contrary to popular opinion, we do not spend a lot on administration. 72% of budget is teacher salaries. 16% is other salaries. We are spending many hours evaluating teachers to be sure we have good ones and that they are doing their job properly. Nothing is more important than quality. Now we recruit everywhere and bring in teachers who are well trained and committed. We pay well for this and we must. In 2000 the high school ranked 30th. This year it will rank 1 to 4. Your Preston School has become the highest performing school in Harrison. Today, our elementary schools outperform those of most of the elite school districts. The reputation of Harrison high school makes a difference for every kid going to college. 93% are getting Regents diplomas vs. 55% before. Less kids are going to private schools. There almost 1200 students at the high school and there is no more room. They are renovating the garage for more classroom space. Hallways and closets are being used for instruction. We will be having summer school for the first time – for 9th and 10th grades. We are adding a high school guidance counselor because kids need to start thinking about college in the 9th grade, not the 11th. We will have a summer writing institute and other new programs and important new technology in “smart boards” for more classrooms. We spend a lot of money training teachers. We are running an new exemplary foreign language program in the elementary schools. This budget is lean but has a lot for the kids. I will tell you the truth always and it will not make everybody happy. I want to spend the money you give me most effectively. I got rid of teacher deans – inefficient and costly – hired 3 assistant principles instead that work all year instead of 180 days and work after school without extra pay. We do not automatically give tenure anymore. Tenure is earned and often rejected. Rate used to be 100%, is now about 65% - higher standards and higher expectations in place to take care of your kids.

Respectfully Submitted,
Angela Amodeo, Secretary
West Harrison Neighborhood Association